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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO OFDA  
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SUBJECT: MAURITANIAN DISASTER ALERT CABLE: HEAVY RAINS  
CAUSE SEVERE FLOODING IN SOUTHERN MAURITANIA

1. Between August 27-29, 2009, 174 mm of rain fell on the southern Mauritanian city of Rosso. Days after the flooding, many houses in the city were still under 15-25 cm of water, with some neighborhoods of Rosso being 90-95% flooded. In Rosso alone, over 2,000 families have been displaced by the floods.

2. To assess the situation, a joint UN-US Embassy mission to Rosso (August 31 - September 1, 2009) reported that there are over 10,000 internally displaced persons in Rosso, with other areas in southern Mauritania in need of humanitarian assistance. Many of the hardest hit areas were among the poorest in Mauritania, with inhabitants already suffering from high levels of poverty and food insecurity rates. Initial estimates indicate an inability of local authorities to provide for the basic needs of residents. UNICEF has made arrangements for the distribution of mosquito nets, water bladders and latrines, but there remains an immediate need for food assistance and measure to improve sanitation in the camps of the displaced families. The World Food Program (WFP) has put together a program to distribute food to 2,500 families in need, and is requesting assistance with this emergency project.

3. The Mission is working with UNICEF to identify appropriate urgent requirements to assist in Rosso. We are also working with the UN and Mauritanian Government to identify other towns that may also require emergency assistance. In light of this situation, the Ambassador expects to issue a disaster declaration in order to alleviate the suffering of those populations that have been severely impacted by the flooding.

The prospect of additional rain and the difficulty of assessing the impact of the floods on smaller villages outside of Rosso means that actual needs may be greater than initial reports indicate.

BOULWARE